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SUBJECT: ANGOLA'S FORGOTTEN ZAIRE PROVINCE: HOPING TO MAKE
TOMORROW BETTER THAN TODAY

REF: A. STATE 0410

[B.](#) STATE 1271

[C.](#) STATE 0527

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador's recent visit to Zaire Province revealed a forgotten, isolated province that so far has been largely by-passed by Angola's economic reconnaissance. The wretched state of the province was evidenced by the obvious poverty of the villages and their inhabitants and the miserable condition of the "highway," linking Soyo, the province's largest city and economic hub, to Luanda (the 280 mile one-way trip took over 20 grueling hours spread over two days, a trip that was repeated for the return to Luanda.) Soyo itself, however, was a ray of hope as construction of a massive liquified natural gas (LNG) plant by the American firm Bechtel continues, creating thousands of desperately needed jobs. End Summary.

ZAIRE, THE FORGOTTEN PROVINCE

¶2. (U) Angola's Zaire Province in the country's northwest corner on the Congo River was ravished during both the country's independence struggle, beginning in 1961, and the subsequent civil war, which continued until 2002. The devastation is manifest in the trail of destroyed bridges and buildings, abandoned plantation farms, mine fields, large swathes of depopulated countryside, and wretched villages whose inhabitants were thin and poorly clothed. The bone-jarring two-day, 20 hour, 280 mile overland trip from Luanda to Soyo, the Province's largest city and economic hub, explained the Province's isolation. Ironically, when asked what has been the biggest change in the Province since the 2002 end of war, Governor Gen.(R) Pedro Sebastiao responded, "Improved roads," adding that until recently land communications among the province's six municipalities (districts) were impossible because of land mines and destroyed bridges.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

¶3. (SBU) The GRA's decision to locate the Angola LNG plant in Soyo, although other locations might have been more suitable from a technical perspective, reflects Luanda's efforts to bring greater prosperity to the province and to improve relations with an area that during the civil war had long sided with opposition elements. The LNG project offers Zaire Province the prospect of a brighter future, featuring more jobs, development of a service industry, and expanded economic activity. Soyo is the province's largest city with a population of 70,000 compared to Mbanza Congo, the region's even more isolated capital, which has 50,000 inhabitants.

¶4. (SBU) Bechtel Corporation, the American company spearheading the plant's construction, will eventually expand the workforce from the current 2500 to more than 7000 as construction accelerates. About 4000 of these employees will be Angolan. Bechtel is committed to hiring as many local employees as possible, but is challenged by the reality that many locals lack the basic education, i.e., the ability to read and write, needed to work on the project. The construction project should conclude by 2012; once the plant is fully operational, a staff of about 350 employees will run

the highly-sophisticated plant. When queried about the fate of local construction workers after plant construction is finished, the Governor responded that the government intends to use them to build LNG-associated industries, such as a fertilizer plant and power generation facility. Angola LNG and Bechtel have good relations with the local community. The area's most prominent traditional leader, Rei do Povo (King of the People), told the Ambassador that he and the people appreciate the jobs that the plant's construction is creating. Similarly, Governor Sebastiao exclaimed to the Ambassador that the plant would be the engine that will drive the province's growth and development. Angola LNG and Bechtel both reach out to the local community by giving tours of the construction site, explaining steps to mitigate the plant's environmental impact, and contributing to local development through volunteer work and other contributions.

¶15. (SBU) The USG, too, is contributing to Zaire Province's growth, particularly in helping the battle against malaria, which decimates the province's population, especially the children. The Ambassador visited a project funded by the President's Malaria Initiative through the Danish organization ADPP. Interestingly, ADPP's local coordinator for the project is Lina Fu, a Chinese national from the Macau area. When the Ambassador commented on the international dynamic of a Chinese national working with a Danish NGO to implement a U.S.-funded malaria project, Ms. Fu reflected on the changing times, adding that she wants to show that Chinese can do more than just construction projects in Angola.

A SIMILAR JOB-CREATION CHALLENGE IN BENGO

¶16. (SBU) On the return leg of his trip, the Ambassador visited the Italian oil services and logistics company Petromar in Ambriz, a small port town in Bengo Province just across the border from Zaire Province. Petromar is rebuilding a logistics base that had been completely destroyed during the war. Petromar, like Angola LNG and Bechtel, seeks to utilize mostly Angolans to run its operations, but also is challenged to find locals who meet the basic employment requirements, such as being able to read and write. Nonetheless, the company has identified some qualified locals, and is training them to be welders and pipe-fitters, two of the most needed skills. Petromar officials opined that in the end many of the 600 employees needed to run the facility will need to come from other parts of Angola.

COMMENT

¶17. (SBU) The Angola LNG plant is a big shot-in-the-arm for impoverished Zaire Province. The plant's construction, estimated to cost nearly \$8 billion, will leave behind a local pool of skilled workers. The challenge will be for the government and the private sector to generate follow-on projects to keep and expand that body of skilled workers in the Soyo area. Otherwise, the workers will leave for opportunities elsewhere in Angola, thus depriving the region of the skilled manpower it needs to sustain growth. Also, if Zaire Province is to end its isolation, the government must build a highway to connect the province to the rest of the country. In light of the region's sandy soil, steep hills and heavy rains, such a highway will be difficult and expensive to build, given the need for a solid roadbed and extensive drainage. Current indications are that the Chinese intend to slap down a layer of tar over the existing roadway, a "solution" that would not survive even a single rainy season. End Comment.